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ON THE
ETERNITY
OF THE
SUPREME BEING,
A
POETICAL ESSAY.

By CHRISTOPHER SMART, M.A.
Of Pembroke-Hall in the University of Cambridge.

THE THIRD EDITION.

CAMBRIDGE,
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M.DCC.LVI.

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Printed by J. Sturges, at the University Press.
1770.



A Clause of Mr. SEATON's Will,

Dated Oct. 8. 1738.

I Give my Kislisbury Estate to the University of Cambridge for ever: the Rents of which shall be disposed of yearly by the Vice-Chancellor for the time being, as he the Vice-Chancellor, the Master of Clare-Hall, and the Greek Professor for the time being, or any two of them shall agree. Which three persons aforesaid shall give out a Subject, which Subject shall for the first Year be one or other of the Perfections or Attributes of the Supreme Being, and so the succeeding Years, till the Subject is exhausted; and afterwards the Subject shall be either Death, Judgment, Heaven, Hell, Purity of heart, &c. or whatever else may be judged by the Vice-Chancellor, Master of Clare-Hall, and Greek Professor to be most conducive to the honour of the Supreme Being and recommendation of Virtue. And they shall yearly dispose of the Rent of the above Estate to that Master of Arts, whose Poem on the Subject given shall be best approved by them. Which Poem I ordain to be always in English, and to be printed; the expence of which shall be deducted out of the product of the Estate, and the residue given as a reward for the Composer of the Poem, or Ode, or Copy of Verses.

WE the underwritten, do assign Mr. SEATON's Reward to C. SMART, M.A. for his Poem on *The Eternity of the Supreme Being*, and direct the said Poem to be printed, according to the tenor of the Will.

March 25. 1750.

Edm. Keene Vice-Chancellor.
J. Wilcox Master of Clare Hall.

h

A Charge of M. 28 AT O'NEILL
Dated Oct. 1773



ON THE
ETERNITY
OF THE
SUPREME BEING.

HAIL, wond'rous Being, who in pow'r supreme
Exists from everlasting, whose great Name
Deep in the human heart, and every atom
The Air, the Earth or azure Main contains
In undecypher'd characters is wrote —
INCOMPREHENSIBLE! — O what can words
The weak interpreters of mortal thoughts,
Or what can thoughts (tho' wild of wing they rove

Thro'

Thro' the vast concave of th' ætherial round)
If to the Heav'n of Heavens they'd win their way
Advent'rous, like the birds of night they're lost,
And delug'd in the flood of dazling day.—

May then the youthful, uninspired Bard
Presume to hymn th' Eternal; may he soar
Where Seraph, and where Cherubin on high
Resound th' unceasing plaudits, and with them
In the grand Chorus mix his feeble voice?

He may — if Thou, who from the witlefs babe
Ordaineft honor, glory, ftrength and praise,
Uplift th' unpinion'd Mufe, and deign'ft t' affift,
GREAT POET OF THE UNIVERSE, his fong.

Before this earthly Planet wound her courfe
Round Light's perennial fountain, before Light
Herfelf 'gan fhine, and at th' inspiring word
Shot to exiftence in a blaze of day,
Before “the Morning-Stars together fang”
And hail'd Thee Architect of countlefs worlds

Thou

Thou art — all-glorious, all-beneficent,
All Wisdom and Omnipotence thou art.

But is the æra of Creation fix'd
At when these Worlds began? Cou'd ought retard
Goodness, that knows no bounds, from blessing ever,
Or keep th' immense Artificer in sloth?
Avaunt the dust-directed crawling thought,
That Puissance immeasurably vast,
And Bounty inconceivable cou'd rest
Content, exhausted with one week of action —
No — in th' exertion of thy righteous pow'r,
Ten thousand times more active than the Sun,
Thou reign'd, and with a mighty hand compos'd
Systems innumerable, matchless all,
All stamp'd with thine uncounterfeited seal.

But yet (if still to more stupendous heights
The Muse unblam'd her aching sense may strain)
Perhaps wrapt up in contemplation deep,
The best of Beings on the noblest theme

Might

Might ruminatè at leisure, Scope immense
Th' eternal Pow'r and Godhead to explore,
And with itself th' omniscient mind replete.
This were enough to fill the boundless All,
This were a Sabbath worthy the Supreme!
Perhaps entron'd amidst a choicer few,
Of Spirits inferior, he might greatly plan
The two prime Pillars of the Universe,
Creation and Redemption — and a while
Pause — with the grand presentiments of glory.

Perhaps — but all's conjecture here below,
All ignorance, and self-plum'd vanity —
O Thou, whose ways to wonder at's distrust,
Whom to describe's presumption (all we can, —
And all we may —) be glorified, be prais'd.

A Day shall come, when all this Earth shall perish,
Nor leave behind ev'n Chaos; it shall come
When all the armies of the elements
Shall war against themselves, and mutual rage

To

THE SUPREME BEING.

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To make Perdition triumph ; it shall come,
When the capacious atmosphere above
Shall in sulphureous thunders groan, and die,
And vanish into void ; the earth beneath
Shall fever to the center, and devour
Th' enormous blaze of the destructive flames.
Ye rocks, that mock the raving of the floods,
And proudly frown upon th' impatient deep,
Where is your grandeur now ? Ye foaming waves,
That all along th' immense Atlantic roar,
In vain ye swell ; will a few drops suffice
To quench the inextinguishable fire ?
Ye mountains, on whose cloud-crown'd tops the cedars
Are lessen'd into shrubs, magnific piles,
That prop the painted chambers of the heav'ns
And fix the earth continual ; Athos, where ;
Where, Tenerif's thy stateliness to-day ?
What, Ætna, are thy flames to these ? — No more
Than the poor glow-worm to the golden Sun.

B

Nor

Nor shall the verdant vallies then remain
Safe in their meek submission; they the debt
Of nature and of justice too must pay.
Yet I must weep for you, ye rival fair,
Arno and Andalusia; but for thee
More largely and with filial tears must weep,
O Albion, O my Country; Thou must join,
In vain dissever'd from the rest, must join
The terrors of th' inevitable ruin.

Nor thou, illustrious monarch of the day;
Nor thou, fair queen of night; nor you, ye stars,
Tho' million leagues and million still remote,
Shall yet survive that day; Ye must submit
Sharers, not bright spectators of the scene.

But tho' the Earth shall to the center perish,
Nor leave behind ev'n Chaos; tho' the air
With all the elements must pass away,
Vain as an ideot's dream; tho' the huge rocks,
That brandish the tall cedars on their tops,

With

With humbler vales must to perdition yield ;
Tho' the gilt Sun, and silver-tressed Moon
With all her bright retinue, must be lost ;
Yet Thou, Great Father of the world, surviv'st
Eternal, as thou wert : Yet still survives
The soul of man immortal, perfect now,
And candidate for unexpiring joys.

He comes ! He comes ! the awful trump I hear ;
The flaming sword's intolerable blaze
I see ; He comes ! th' Archangel from above.

“ Arise, ye tenants of the silent grave,
“ Awake incorruptible and arise ;
“ From east to west, from the antarctic pole
“ To regions hyperborean, all ye sons,
“ Ye sons of Adam, and ye heirs of Heav'n—
“ Arise, ye tenants of the silent grave,
“ Awake incorruptible and arise.

'Tis then, nor sooner, that the restless mind
Shall find itself at home ; and like the ark

Fix'd on the mountain-top, shall look aloft
O'er the vague passage of precarious life;
And, winds and waves and rocks and tempests past,
Enjoy the everlasting calm of Heav'n:
'Tis then, nor sooner, that the deathless soul
Shall justly know its nature and its rise:
'Tis then the human tongue new-tun'd shall give
Praises more worthy the eternal ear.
Yet what we can, we ought; — and therefore, Thou,
Purge thou my heart, Omnipotent and good!
Purge thou my heart with hyssop, lest like Cain
I offer fruitless sacrifice, and with gifts
Offend and not propitiate the Ador'd.
Tho' gratitude were blest'd with all the pow'rs
Her bursting heart cou'd long for, tho' the swift,
The firey-wing'd imagination soar'd
Beyond ambition's wish — yet all were vain
To speak Him as he is, who is INEFFABLE.
Yet still 'et reason thro' the eye of faith

View

View him with fearful love ; let truth pronounce,
And adoration on her bended knee
With Heav'n-directed hands confess His reign.
And let th' Angelic, Archangelic band
With all the Hosts of Heav'n, Cherubic forms,
And forms Seraphic, with their silver trumps
And golden lyres attend : — “ For Thou art holy,
“ For thou art One, th' Eternal, who alone
“ Exerts all goodness, and transcends all praise.”

F I N I S.

THE SUPREME BEING.

View him with fearful love; let truth pronounce

And adoration on her bearded face

With Heaven-dreathed hands control His reign

And let th' Angelic Archangelic band

With all the hosts of Heaven's Christian host

And forms Seraphic with their silver wings

And golden fire around them shine

As thou art One, O Father, God alone

o Father in goodness, and mercies to all praise



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